He Breaks His Silence on Watergate

Nixon's Brother Lets Off Some Steam

By Robert H. Jackson and Howard Seelye
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F. Donald Nixon says the Watergate affair and "harassment" by Senate investigators have damaged his health and have left him nearly broke.

In a wide-ranging interview at his home here, the President's 59-year-old brother lashed out at his accusers and said the Nixon family is standing firm against those who are seeking "to bury" the President.

Breaking a long, self-imposed silence, Nixon vented his anger at former friends, at members of the White House "palace guard" and at leaks from congressional committees, which he said have made reporting of Watergate "all one-sided."

On other matters, he said he had asked the Secret Service long ago to undertake surveillance of his family, but was not told when the agency began a tap of his phone.

He said Watergate "has been damaging to my livelihood, my health and my whole family.

Although hospitalized several months ago with a heart ailment, Nixon appeared tanned and healthy as he spoke with Times reporters around a redwood table on the patio of his home overlooking upper Newport bay.

Saying that his bank records have been subpoenaed and his friends questioned and "harassed" by staff members of the Senate Watergate Committee, he charged that investigators are unfairly trying to link him to a $100,000 cash sum that presidential confidant Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo says was kept in a safe deposit box for three years.

"They are Nixon haters," Nixon said of the committee staff. "I think they were handpicked for that purpose."

He denied that Rebozo had ever paid him or lent him any of the $100,000 despite closed-door Senate testimony by Herbert W. Kalmbach, the President's one-time personal attorney, that Rebozo told him he gave some of these funds to the President's brothers and to presidential secretary Rose Mary Woods.

The President's other brother, Edward, and Miss Woods also have denied receiving any of the funds, which Rebozo said he accepted in 1970 as a campaign contribution from billionaire industrialist Howard R. Hughes. Rebozo, too, has denied Kalmbach's version.

Asked why Kalmbach, a friend and close neighbor of Donald Nixon's, would implicate him if such a story were false, Nixon replied:

"God only knows. One of them (Rebozo or Kalmbach) is lying or there was a terrible misunderstanding. I've got legal action against someone if I want it."

Discussing the impact of the Watergate investigation on his work as a food service executive, Nixon said he was forced to quit a consulting job with the Carnation Co. in January and that he also took early retirement on April 15 from his post as a vice president of the Marriott Corp., a worldwide hotel and restaurant concern.

From a total income of $140,000 in 1973, Nixon said he has dropped to $36,000 annually. This derives mainly from reduced employment as a consultant to the Marriott Corp. — a contract that expires next January 31 — and from work he performs for the San-Bar Corp., a Southern California electronics firm.

Nixon said he agreed to a Times interview because he thought that "the reporting of Watergate has all been one-sided. All the leaks have come from one side. I'm blaming the Senate staff, not the senators."

He said it was "a healthy situation to have criticism" but that he was compelled to lies written about me."

"It's unfortunate that what happened, happened," Nixon said of the Watergate scandal. "But people are using this as a political football to bury my brother."

Asked to whom he was referring, Nixon replied:

"The opposition party and all those who might have feelings and leanings toward that party."

He said this included "more than a majority of the press."

"The truth will always come out in the end," he said. "Our family was raised to respect the truth. My father and mother were sticklers for the truth.

"My brother will not be impeached, and he will still go down as one of the greatest presidents this country has ever seen."

Nixon attributed the original Watergate break-in to "political amateurism" and said it might not have occurred but for a "protective wall" set up around the President by top White House aides.

"I don't think the President was served worth a damn by certain individuals who saw themselves as the palace guard," Nixon said.

Nixon declined to name names, but the "palace guard" has come to mean, at its highest levels, former White House aides H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman.

It was reported last year that Donald Nixon's home telephone had been tapped for a period of time, on orders from the White House, allegedly to keep track of his business deals. At the time he was frequently in the company of John H. Meier, a free-wheeling former aide of Howard Hughes.

Meier is under federal indictment for allegedly evading $1.6 million in income taxes and funneling $4.8 million into foreign bank accounts. He allegedly sold mining claims at inflated sums.

The Watergate committee last winter began probing Meier's past relationship to Donald Nixon, particularly whether any improper business deals involving the two men may have led indirectly to the Watergate break-in of June, 1972.

A theory the committee said it was examining was that Nixon administration officials approved the break-in to determine whether Democratic national chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien had "embarrassing" information about Nixon's finances.

"I never had any financial dealings with John Meier," Nixon said flatly.

Nixon conceded, however, that he may have been "gullible" in taking several foreign trips with Meier. On one — to the Dominican Republic in 1969 — he said he "got roped into a meeting" at which Meier and his associates began discussing mining rights with Dominican government officials.

"I didn't know a thing about it. I didn't open my damn mouth," Nixon said.

He said that Meier picked up the tab for most of his expenses overseas, but that he never accepted any payments from Meier or joined him in any investments.

On a subsequent trip to Switzerland with Meier and Anthony Hatsis, an associate of Meier's who has also been indicted for conspiracy to hide funds overseas, Nixon said the two men "had a stack of $100 bills an inch and a half thick.

"They worked on me that whole trip," Nixon said. "They offered me $200,000 a year to join their organization, but I never accepted. I only went along because they said they were going to introduce me to people who wanted to invest in hotels, which was part of my consulting work. But I never did meet these people.

"I didn't want to make any more trips with this guy (Meier), but they kept after me, saying the same group of people wanted to buy hotels," Nixon said.

After traveling to Hawaii with Meier to meet two potential investors "who never showed up," Nixon said he quit associating with Meier.